The GIRL and the BILL

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SYNOPSIS.

At the expense of a soiled hat Robert Orme saves from arrest a girl in a black touring car who has caused a traffic jam on State street. He buys a new hat and is given in change a five dollar bill with: "Remember the person you pay this to," written on it. A second time he helps the lady in the black car, and learns that in Tom and Bessie Wallingham they have mutual friends, but gains no further hint of her identity. He discovers another inscription on the marked bill, which, in a futile attempt to decipher it, he copies and places the copy in a drawer in his apartment. Senor Poritol, South American, calls, and claims the marked bill. Orme refuses, and a fight ensues in which Poritol is overcome. He calls in Senor Alcatrante, minister from his country, to vouch for him. Orme still refuses to give up the bill. Orme goes for a walk and sees two Japs attack Alcatrante. He rescues him. Returning to his rooms Orme is attacked by two Japs who effect a forcible exchange of the marked bill for another. Orme finds the girl of the black car waiting for him. She also wants the bill. Orme tells his story. She recognizes one of the Japs as her father's butler, Maku. The second inscription on the bill is the key to the hiding place of important papers stolen from her father. Both Japs and South Americans want the papers. Orme and the "Girl" start out in the black car in quest of the papers. In the university grounds in Evanston the hiding place is located. Maku and another Jap are there. Orme foils Maku and the other Jap escapes. Orme finds in Maku's pocket a folded slip of paper. He takes the girl, whose name is still unknown to him, to the home of a friend in Evanston. Returning to the university grounds Orme gets in conversation with a guard at the life-saving station. They hear a motor boat in trouble in the darkness on the lake. They find the crippled boat. In it are the Jap with the papers and "Girl." She jumps into Orme's boat, but the Jap eludes pursuit. "Girl" explains her presence in the boat. Orme boards a car for the city and finds Maku on it and trails him in hope of finding the Jap who has the papers.

CHAPTER VIII.—Continued.

Orme followed, and when Maku turned west again at the next street, swung rapidly after him and around the corner with the full expectation of seeing him hurrying along half a block away. But no one was in sight. Had he slipped into one of the near-by buildings?

While Orme was puzzling, a voice at his elbow said, "Hello!"

He turned with a start. Flattened in a shadowed niche of the wall beside him was Maku!

"Hello!" the Japanese said again.

"Well?" exclaimed Orme sharply, trying to make the best of the situation.

"You mus' not follow me." The Japanese spoke impressively.

"Follow you?"

"I saw you in a mirror at the other end of car."

So that was it! Orme remembered no mirror, but the Japanese might apply the word to the reflecting surface of one of the forward windows.

"You lit a match," continued Maku. "I saw. Then I come here, to find if you follow."

Orme considered. Now that he was discovered, it would be futile to continue the chase, since Maku, naturally, would not go to his destination with Orme at his heels. But he said:

"You can't order me off the streets, Maku."

"I know. If you follow, then we walk an' walk an' walk—mebbe till nex' week." Orme swore under his breath. It was quite clear that the little Japanese would never rejoin the man who had the papers until he was sure that he had shaken off his pursuer. So Orme simply said:

"Goodnight."

Disappointed, baffled, he turned eastward and walked with long strides back toward the car line. He did not look to see whether Maku was behind him. That did not matter now. He had missed his second opportunity since the other Japanese escaped him in the university campus.

Crossing Clark street a block north of the point at which he and Maku had left the car, he continued lakeward, coming out on the drive only a short distance from the Pere Marquette, and a few minutes later, after giving the elevator boy orders to call him at eight in the morning, he was in his apartment, with the prospect of four hours of sleep.

But there was a final question: Should he return to the all-night restaurant near the car barns and try to learn from the cashier the address which Maku had sought? Surely she would have forgotten the name by this time. Perhaps it was a Japanese name, and, therefore, the harder to remember it; if it were a peculiar combination of letters, the very peculiarity might have fixed it in her mind. And if he hesitated to go back there now, the slim chance that the name remained with her would grow slimmer with every added moment of delay. He felt that he ought to go. He was dog-tired, but—he remembered the girl's anxiety. Yes, he would go; with the bare possibility that the cashier would remember and would be willing to tell him what she remembered, he would go.

He took up his hat and stepped toward the door. At that moment he heard a sound from his bedroom. It was an unmistakable snore. He tiptoed to the bedroom door and peered within. Seated in an arm chair was a man. He was distinctly visible in the light which came in from the sitting room, and it was quite plain that he was sound asleep and breathing heavily. And now for the second time his palate vibrated with the raucous voice of sleep.

Orme switched on the bedroom lights. The man opened his eyes and started from the chair.

"Who are you?" demanded Orme.

"Why—the detective, of course."

"Detective?"

"Sure—regular force."

"Regular force?"

The stranger pulled back his coat and displayed his nickeled star.

"But what are you doing here?" gasped Orme, amazed.

"Why, a foreign fellow came to the chief and said you wanted a man to keep an eye on your quarters tonight—and the chief sent me. I was dozing a bit—but I'm a light sleeper. I wake at the least noise.

Orme smiled reminiscently, thinking of the snore. "Tell me," he said, "was it Senor Alcatrante who had you sent?"

"I believe that was his name." He was slowly regaining his sleep-benumbed wits. "That reminds me," he continued. "He gave me a note for you."

An envelope was produced from an inside pocket. Orme took it and tore it open. The sheet within bore the caption, "Office of the Chief of Police," and the few lines, written beneath in fine script, were as follows:

"Dear Mr. Orme: You will, I am sure, pardon my seeming overanxiety for your safety, and the safety of Poritol's treasure, but I cannot resist using my influence to see that you are well protected tonight by what you in America call 'a plain-clothes man.' I trust that he will frighten away the yellow peril and permit you to slumber undisturbed. If you do not wish him inside your apartment, he will sit in the hall outside your door.

"With all regard for your continued good health, believe me, dear Mr. Orme, Yours, etc., etc.,

"PEDRO ALCATRANTE."

In view of everything that had happened since the note was penned, Orme smiled a grim smile. Alcatrante must have been very anxious indeed; and yet, considering that the minister knew nothing of Orme's encounter with the Japanese and his meeting with the girl, the sending of the detective might naturally have been expected to pass as an impressive, but friendly, precaution.

The detective was rapidly losing his self-assurance. "I had only been asleep for a moment," he said.

"Yes?" Orme spoke indifferently. "Well, you may go now. There is no longer any need of you here."

"But my instructions—"

"Were given under a misapprehension. My return makes your presence unnecessary. Goodnight—or good-morning rather." He nodded toward the door.

The detective hesitated. "Look a here!" he suddenly burst out. "I never saw you before."

"Nor I you," replied Orme.

"Then how do I know that you are Mr. Orme? You may be the very chap I was to keep out, far as I know."

"Sure enough, I may be," said Orme dryly, adding: "But I am not. Now go."

The detective narrowed his eyebrows. "Not without identification."

"Ask the night clerk," exclaimed Orme impatiently. "Can't you see I don't wish to be bothered any longer?"

He went over to the door and threw it open.

"Come," he continued. "Well, here then"—as the detective did not move—"here's my card. That ought to do you."

He took a card from his pocket case and offered it to the detective, who, after scrutinizing it for a moment, let it fall to the floor.

"Oh, it's all right, I guess," he said. "But what shall I say to the chief?"

"Simply say that I didn't need you any longer."

The detective picked up his hat and went.

"Thank heaven!" exclaimed Orme as he closed the door. "But I wonder why I didn't notice his hat. It was lying here in plain sight."

He went to the telephone and spoke to the clerk. "Did you let that detective into my apartment?" he asked.

"Why, yes, Mr. Orme. He was one of the regular force, and he said that you wanted him here. I called up the chief's office, and the order was corroborated. I meant to tell you when you came in, but you passed the desk just while I was down eating my supper. The elevator boy let you in, didn't he?"

"Yes. Never mind, it's all right. Good night."

But when Orme examined his traveling bag he found that some one had evidently made a search through it. Nothing had been taken, but the orderly arrangement of his effects had been disturbed. His conclusion was that Alcatrante had bribed the fellow to go much farther than official zeal demanded. Doubtless the minister had paid the detective to hunt for a marked five-dollar bill and make a copy of whatever was written on it—which would have been quite a safe proceeding for the detective, if he were not caught at the task. A subtle man, Alcatrante; but no subtler than the Japanese.

Dismissing the incident from his mind, Orme again made ready to return to the all-night restaurant. He paused at the door, however, to give the situation a final analysis. Maku had lost something. After hunting for it vainly he had gone to the city directory for information which appeared to satisfy him. Then what he lost must have been an address. How would he have been likely to lose it?

He Read It Over Several Times.

Orme's fatigue was so great that he repeated the question to himself several times without seeing any meaning in it. He forced his tired brain back to the first statement. Maku had lost something. Yes, he had lost something. What was it he had lost? Oh, yes, a paper.

It was futile. His brain refused to work.

Maku had lost a paper. A paper?

"Ah!" Orme was awake now.

"How stupid!" he exclaimed.

For he had entirely forgotten the paper which he had taken from the pocket of the unconscious Maku, there on the campus! He had thrust it into his pocket without looking at it, and in the excitement of his later adventures it had passed utterly from his memory.

Another moment and he had the paper in his hand. His fingers shook as he unfolded it, and he felt angry at his weakness. Yes, there it was—the address—written in an unformed hand. If he had only thought of the paper before, he would have been saved a deal of trouble—would have had more sleep. He read it over several times—"Three forty-one North Parker street"—so that he would remember it if the paper should be lost.

"I'm glad Maku didn't write it in Japanese!" he exclaimed.

CHAPTER IX.

Number Three Forty-One.

When Orme was aroused by the ringing of his telephone bell the next morning and heard the clerk's voice saying over the wire, "Eight o'clock, sir," it seemed as if he had been asleep but a few minutes.

During breakfast he reviewed the events of the preceding evening. Strange and varied though they had been, his thoughts chiefly turned to the girl herself, and he shaped all his plans with the idea of pleasing her. The work he had set for himself was to get the envelope and deliver it to the girl. This plan involved the finding of the man who had escaped from the tree.

The search was not so nearly blind as it would have been if Orme had not found that folded slip of paper in Maku's pocket. The address, "three forty-one North Parker street," was unquestionably the destination at which Maku had expected to meet friends.

To North Parker street, then, Orme prepared to go. Much as he longed to see the girl again, he was glad that they were not to make this adventure together, for the reputation of North Parker street was unsavory.

Orme found his way readily enough. There was not far to go, and he preferred to walk. But before he reached his destination he remembered that he had promised Alcatrante and Poritol to meet them at his apartment at ten o'clock.

His obligation to the two South Americans seemed slight, now that the bill had passed from his hands and that he knew the nature of Poritol's actions. Nevertheless, he was a man of his word, and he hurried back to the Pere Marquette, for the hour was close to ten. He was influenced to some extent by the thought that Poritol and Alcatrante, on learning how he had been robbed of the bill, might unwittingly give him a further clue.

No one had called for him. He waited till ten minutes past the hour before he concluded that he had fulfilled his part of the bargain with them. Though he did not understand it, he attached no especial significance to their failure to appear.

Once again he went to North Parker street. Three forty-one proved to be a notion shop. Through the window he saw a stout woman reading a newspaper behind the counter. When he entered she laid the paper aside and arose languidly, as though customers were rather a nuisance than a blessing. She was forty, but not fair.

Orme asked to see a set of studs. She drew a box from a show case and spread the assortment before him.

He selected a set and paid her, offering a ten-dollar bill. She turned to a cash register and made change—which included a five-dollar bill.

Orme could hardly believe his eyes. The bill which she placed in his hand bore the written words: "Remember person you pay this to."

He turned it over. In the corner was a familiar set of abbreviations. There was no doubt about it. The bill was the same which had been taken from him, and which he had last seen in the possession of Maku.

What an insistent piece of green paper that marked bill was! It had started him on this remarkable series of adventures. It had introduced excitable little Poritol and the suave Alcatrante to his apartment. It had made him the victim of the attack by the two Japanese. It had brought the girl into his life. And now it came again into his possession just at the moment to prove that he was on the right track in his search for Maku and the man who had the papers. The queerest coincidence was that the bill would never have come into his possession at all had it not been for his first meeting with the girl—who at that very time was herself searching for it. The rubbing of his hat against the wheel of her car—on so little thing as that had hinged the events followed.

"This is strange," Orme addressed the woman.

"It doesn't hurt it any," said the woman, indifferently.

"I know that. But it's a curious thing just the same."

The woman raised her shoulders slightly, and began to put away the stock she had taken out for Orme's benefit.

"Who paid this to you?" persisted Orme.

"How should I remember? I can't keep track of all the persons that come in the store during the day."

"But I should think that anything so queer as this—" He saw that he could get nothing from her except by annoying her.

The woman glared. "What you a botherin' about? Why don't you leave well enough alone?"

Orme smiled. "Tell me one thing," he said, "do you know a Japanese that lives hereabouts?"

"Oh," said the woman, "so you're one of the gentlemen he was expectin', eh? Well, it's the front flat, two flights up."

"Thank you," said Orme. He walked out to the street, whence a backward glance showed him the woman again concealed in her newspaper.

At one side of the shop he found the entrance to a flight of stairs which led to the floors above. In the little hallway, just before the narrow ascent began, was a row of electric buttons and names, and under each of them a mail box. "3a" had a card on which was printed:

"Arima, Teacher of Original Kana Jiu-Jitsu."

Should he go boldly up and present himself as a prospective pupil? If Arima were the one who had so effectively thrown him the night before he would certainly remember the man he had thrown and would promptly be on his guard. Also, the woman in the shop had said, "you are one of the gentlemen he was expectin'." Others were coming.

Prudence suggested that he conceal himself in an entry across the street and keep an eye out for the persons who were coming to visit Arima. He assumed that their coming had something to do with the stolen paper. But he had no way of knowing who the athlete's guests would be. There might be no one among them whom he could recognize. And even if he saw them all go in, how would his own purpose be served by merely watching them? In time, no doubt, they would all come out again, and one of them would have the papers in his possession, and Orme would not know which one.

For all he was aware, some of the guests had already arrived. They might even now be gathering with eager eyes about the unfolded documents. No. Orme realized that his place was not on the sidewalk. By some means he must get where he could discover what was going on in the front flat on the third floor. Standing where he now was there was momentary danger of being discovered by persons who would guess why he was there. Maku might come.

Orme looked to see who lived in "4a," the flat above the Japanese. The card bore the name:

"Madam Alla, Clairvoyant and Trance Medium."

"I think I will have my fortune told," muttered Orme, as he pressed Madam Alla's bell and started up the stairs.

At the top of the second flight he looked to the entrance of the front apartment. It had a large square of ground glass, with the name "Arima" in black letters. He continued upward another flight and presently found himself before two blank doors—one at the front and one a little at one side. The side door opened slowly in response to his knock.

Before him stood a blowsy but not altogether unprepossessing woman of middle years. She wore a cheap print gown. A gipsy scarf was thrown over her head and shoulders, and her ears held loop earrings. Her inquiring glance at Orme was not unmixed with suspicion.

"Madam Alla?" inquired Orme.

She nodded and stood aside for him to enter. He passed into a cheap little reception hall which looked out on the street, and then, at her silent direction went through a door at one side and found himself in the medium's sanctum.

The one window gave on a dimly lighted narrow space which apparently had been cut in from the back of the building. Through the dusty glass he could see the railing of a fire-escape platform, and cutting diagonally across the light, part of the stairs led to the platform above. There was a closed door, which apparently opened into the outer hall. In the room were dirty red hangings, two chairs, a couch, and a small square center table.

Madam Alla had already seated herself at the table and was shuffling a pack of cards. "Fifty-cent reading?" she asked, as he took the chair opposite her.

Orme nodded. His thoughts were on the window and the fire escape, and he hardly heard her monotonous sentences, though he obeyed mechanically her instructions to cut and shuffle.

"You are about to engage in a new business," she was saying. "You will be successful, but there will be some trouble about a dark man. Look out for him. He talks fair, but he means mischief.—There is a woman, too.—This man will try to prejudice her against you." And all the time Orme was saying to himself, "How can I persuade her to let me use the fire escape?"

Suddenly he was conscious that the woman had ceased speaking and was running the cards through her fingers and looking at him searchingly. "You are not listening," she said, as he met her gaze.

He smiled apologetically. "I know—I was preoccupied."

"I can't help you if you don't listen."

Orme inferred that she took pride in her work. He sighed, and looked grave. "I am afraid," he said slowly, "that my case is too serious for the cards."

She brightened. "You'd ought to have a trance-reading—two dollars."

"I'd take any kind of reading that would help me, but I'm afraid the situation is too difficult."

"Then why did you come?" Again the look of suspicion.

"I came because you could help me, but not by a reading."

"What do you mean?" Plainly she was frightened. "I don't put people away. That's out of my line. Honest!"

"Do I look as if I wanted anything crooked done?" Orme smiled.

"It's hard to tell what folks want," she muttered. "You're a fly-cop, aren't you?"

"What makes you think that?"

"The way you been sizing things up. You aren't going to do anything, are you? I pay regular for my protection every month—five dollars—and I work hard to get it, too."

Orme hesitated. He had known at the outset that he was of a class different from the ordinary run of her clients. The difference undoubtedly had both puzzled and frightened her. He might disabuse her of the notion that he had anything to do with the police, but her misapprehension was an advantage that he was loath to lose. Fearing him, she might grant any favor.

"Now, listen to me," he said at last. "I don't mean you any harm, but I want you to answer a few questions."

She eyed him furtively.

"Do you know the man in the flat below?" he demanded.

"Mr Arima? No. He's a Jap. I see him in the halls sometimes, but I don't do no more than bow, like any neighbor."

"He's noisy, isn't he?"

"Only when he has pupils. But he goes out to do most of his teaching. Is he wanted?"

"Not exactly. Now look here. I believe you're a well-meaning woman. Do you make a good thing out of this business?"

"Fair." She smiled faintly. "I ain't been in Chicago long, and it takes time to work up a good trade. I got a daughter to bring up. She's with friends. She don't know anything about what I do for a living."

"Well," said Orme, "I'm going to give you five dollars toward educating your girl."

He took a bill from his pocketbook and handed it to her. She accepted it with a deprecating glance and a smile that was tinged with pathetic coquetry. Then she looked at it strangely. "What's the writing?" she asked.

Orme started. He had given her the marked five-dollar bill. "I didn't mean to give you that one," he said, taking it from her fingers.

She stared at him. "Is it fony?"

"No—but I want it. Here's another." As he took a fresh bill from his pocketbook he discovered to his

"You Seem to Be Acquainted With Your Neighbor, After All."

surprise that the marked bill, together with the few dollars in change he had received after his purchase in the shop below, was all that he now had left in his pocket. He remembered that he had intended to draw on his funds that morning. His departure from New York had been hurried, and he had come away with little ready cash.

Madam Alla slipped the bill into her bosom and waited. She knew well enough that her visitor had some demand to make.

"Now," said Orme, "I am going to use your fire escape for a little while."

The woman nodded.

"I want you to keep all visitors out," he continued. "Don't answer the bell. I may want to come back this way quick."

"This is straight business, isn't it? I don't want to get into no trouble."

"Absolutely straight," said Orme. "All you have to do is to leave your window open and keep quiet."

"You can count on me," she said. "Perhaps you know all about the place down there, but if you don't, I'll tell you that the fire escape leads into his reception room."

Orme smiled. "You seem to be acquainted with your neighbor, after all?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Avoid Suspicion.

"When you're walking through your neighbor's melon patch, don't tie your shoe."—Atlantic Monthly.